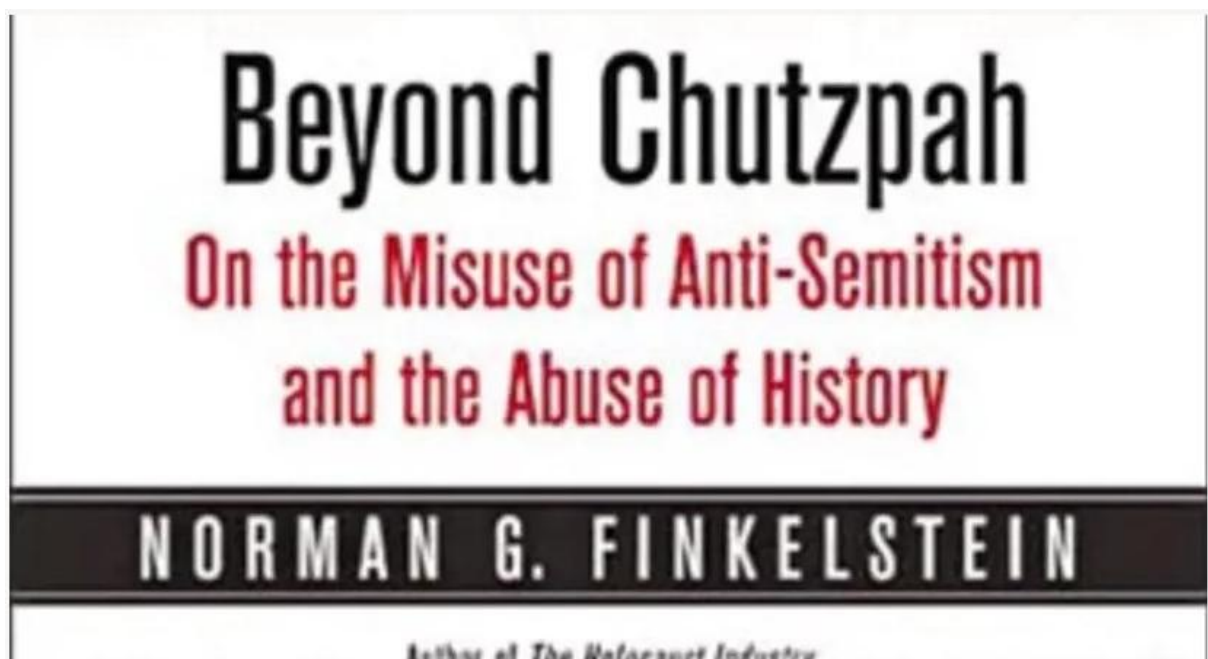


His own worst enemy

An interview with Norman Finkelstein reveals a man entirely comfortable in his own self-hate.

By BEN NAPARSTEK
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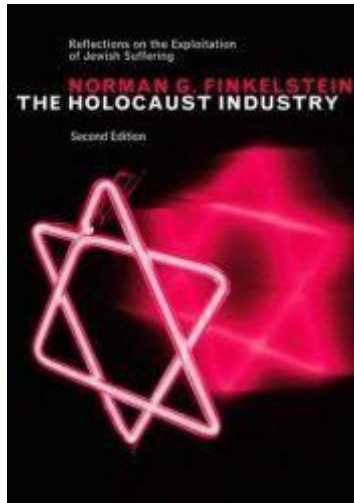
Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History By Norman G. Finkelstein University of California Press 343pp., \$22.50

Norman Finkelstein is the academic equivalent of a street fighter. An anti-Zionist crusader who's also the child of Holocaust survivors, he regularly likens Jewish officials to anti-Semitic stereotypes, and has called Elie Wiesel the "resident clown" of the Holocaust "circus." He's a far left academic with a strong support base among the Holocaust-denying right, a man who one Jewish intellectual has described as "poison... a disgusting, self-hating Jew... something you find under a rock." He rose to notoriety in 2000 with *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, which argued that organized Jewry exploits the memory of the Holocaust to deflect criticism of Israel and blackmail European governments for compensation. Finkelstein's tract was initially ignored in the US but was translated into 17 languages and spent nine months on German bestseller lists. Only after the book created a storm in Europe did mainstream American publications pay any attention. Finkelstein boasts that The New York Times reviewed *The Holocaust Industry* more savagely than Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Writing in its pages, historian Omer Bartov described it as "an ideological fanatic's view of other people's opportunism - filled with precisely the kind of shrill hyperbole that Finkelstein rightly deplores in much of the current media hype over the Holocaust." His new book, *Beyond Chutzpah*, reprises these themes. Finkelstein argues that American Jewish leaders wield the club of anti-Semitism to silence critics of Israel. "By turning a blind eye to Israeli crimes in the name of sensitivity to past Jewish suffering, [Jewish leaders] enable Israel to continue on a murderous path that foments anti-Semitism," he writes. "Alongside Israel, they are the main fomenters of anti-Semitism in the world today." The second half of the book is given over to a debunking of Harvard legal scholar Alan

Dershowitz's 2004 bestseller *The Case For Israel*. Finkelstein alleges that Dershowitz's book is a "hoax" stitched together from spurious sources, with vast swathes plagiarized from Joan Peters's *From Time Immemorial*. Dershowitz is America's most visible celebrity barrister, as well as a tireless campaigner for Israel. After September 11, he became a target of hate to many left-wing civil libertarians for advocating the torture of suspected terrorists. Noam Chomsky has called Dershowitz a "Stalinist-style thug." In an academic dogfight that made headlines throughout America, Dershowitz launched a fierce campaign to stop *Beyond Chutzpah* going to press. When his efforts to deter University of California Press failed, he asked Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to intervene. Schwarzenegger refused to get involved in what he called "an issue of academic freedom." Finkelstein says he's less interested in exposing Dershowitz's fraud as the corruption of intellectual debate on Israel-Palestine. "Alan Dershowitz is a pathological liar, but I don't think he's the problem. The problem is the institutions which give you a free ride when you toe the party line. The problem is The New York Times which praised his hoax, the deans at Harvard who don't call him to account." Finkelstein makes no pretense about his academic credentials, bragging that he's never been published in an academic journal and teaches at a "third-rate university" in Chicago because he was "kicked out of every job" in New York. But reasoned objectivity is not his aim, for Finkelstein is an angry man and writing is his therapy. "The only reason I ever write anything is because I get so angry I start screaming at the pages. My breath gets short and I start walking around. It's just all lies! Rather than having it locked up inside of me, I write it out." For his supporters - most prominently, friend and mentor Noam Chomsky - Finkelstein is a bold iconoclast, prepared to speak the unspeakable about questions long sidelined in deference to political correctness. In his just-published book *The Case for Peace*, Dershowitz argues that Chomsky uses Finkelstein as a "hit man" to voice his hard-left perspective on Jewish issues, which Chomsky has avoided ever since his name became tarnished by his association with Holocaust deniers. Finkelstein is untroubled about his work being embraced by neo-Nazis. "In World War II, Thomas Mann went on radio constantly denouncing the Nazi regime and they all said, 'That's giving comfort to anti-teutonic feeling.' I'm sure there are people who are gleeful that a Jew is sticking it to the Jews. But you have to say, 'Well, who are the main victims now? Is it Jews or Palestinians?' If my writing can mitigate, even in a small way, the suffering Palestinians have to endure, and if it gives some comfort to a handful of kooks and loonies, then I think that price is acceptable." If Finkelstein was concerned about being a neo-Nazi pin-up, he wouldn't use Nazi Germany as his most persistent analogy for Israel and the American Jewish lobby. Asked about Dershowitz's claim that Finkelstein's mother was a Nazi collaborator, Finkelstein doesn't hesitate to quote from *Mein Kampf*. "He had a good insight, Hitler. He said in *Mein Kampf*: 'If you say a small lie, people think: 'well, maybe that's true, maybe that's false.' But if you say a colossal lie, people think: 'Nobody could possibly be so brazen as to make something like that up.' Say Finkelstein's mother is a Nazi collaborator and people will believe it. It's Hitler's Big Lie." For Finkelstein, the outrage that greets his work proves his argument that Jewish officials deploy the stereotype of the eternal Jewish victim to immunize themselves from criticism. "If you were to say American actions in Iraq caused a lot of anti-American feeling, would anyone think twice about it? But if you say that the Jews and the Jewish state cause anti-Jewish feeling, everybody calls: 'Horror! That's blaming the victim.'"

The Holocaust Industry

Politics by Norman Finkelstein



The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering is a 2000 book by Norman G. Finkelstein in which he argues that the American Jewish establishment exploits the memory of the Nazi Holocaust for political and financial gain, as well as to further the interests of Israel. According to Finkelstein, this "Holocaust industry" has corrupted Jewish culture and the authentic memory of the Holocaust.

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